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ASMUSSEN DUO OF TIGHT TEN, TOBACCO ROAD HEAD IROQUOIS AS CHURCHILL DOWNS' KICKS OFF 'ROAD TO THE KENTUCKY DERBY'

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (Wednesday, Sept. 12, 2018) – The “Road to the Kentucky Derby Presented by Woodford Reserve” officially begins Saturday as 12 promising 2-year-olds, led by Hall of Fame trainer **Steve Asmussen**’s duo of Saratoga Special (Grade II) runner-up **Tight Ten** and Ellis Park Juvenile winner **Tobacco Road**, were entered in the 37th running of the \$150,000 Iroquois Stakes (GIII) at Churchill Downs.

The 1 1/16-mile Iroquois, one of four stakes events on the first Saturday of the 11-day September Meet, is the first scoring race on the 2018-19 “Road to the Kentucky Derby” – the series of 35 races that will ultimately determine the field for the 145th running of the Kentucky Derby Presented by Woodford Reserve (GI) on Saturday, May 4, 2019. Points awarded to the Top 4 Iroquois finishers will be 10-4-2-1 as part of the 19-race “Prep Season” that showcases foundation-building races in advance of the “Kentucky Derby Championship Series,” which begins in late February.

The Iroquois also is part of the Breeders’ Cup “**Win & You’re In**” program with the winner receiving an automatic berth into the \$2 million Sentient Jet Breeders’ Cup Juvenile (GI) on Nov. 2 at Churchill Downs. The Breeders’ Cup Juvenile is the featured race on “Future Stars Friday” – the 10-race program that includes four additional Breeders’ Cup races for 2-year-olds: the \$2 million Juvenile Fillies (GI), \$1 million Juvenile Turf (GI), \$1 million Juvenile Fillies Turf (GI) and \$1 million Juvenile Turf Sprint.

Headlining Saturday’s Iroquois field is **Winchell Thoroughbreds**’ Tight Ten (2-1-1-0—\$70,600). The 2-year-old Tapit colt impressively broke his maiden by 4 ¼ lengths under **Ricardo Santana Jr.** on June 28 at Churchill Downs. The homebred spent July and August at Saratoga Race Course and finished a game runner-up behind **Call Paul** in the Aug. 12 Saratoga Special.

Joining Tight Ten in the Iroquois starting gate is stablemate Tobacco Road (3-2-0-0—\$70,905). Owned by **L and N Racing**, the Quality Road colt rallied from off the pace as the 9-5 post time favorite under leading rider **Corey Lanerie** to narrowly win the \$75,000 Ellis Park Juvenile on Aug. 19 over **Whiskey Echo** and **Manny Wah**.

Santana has the return call on Tight Ten and drew post position four while **Julien Leparoux** picks up the mount on Tobacco Road and drew post position six.

Susan Moulton’s Manny Wah will once again line up against Tobacco Road for a rematch of the Ellis Park Juvenile. The chestnut colt broke his maiden in his second-career start under **Channing Hill** over the synthetic surface of Arlington Park in late July prior to finishing three-quarters of a length behind Tobacco Road in the Ellis Park Juvenile.

“I think we could win this time,” trainer **Wayne Catalano** said. “It’s the perfect spot. We had a really fast work last week and he looked great. We really ran well down at Ellis. This is the right spot to get points for the Derby and a spot for the Breeders’ Cup Juvenile right in our back yard. We can walk right out of our stall for the race.”

Other top contenders lined up in the Iroquois are **Something Special Racing**’s fast-closing maiden winner **Hog Creek Hustle** (1-1-0-0—\$25,200) for trainer **Vickie Foley**; **Calumet Farm**’s debut winner **Everfast** (1-1-0-0—\$25,200) for Churchill Downs’ all-time leading trainer **Dale Romans**; and **Big Chief Racing**, **Madaket Stables** and **Rocker Ranch**’s Best Pal (GII) third-place finisher **Synthesis** (4-0-0-3—\$41,160) for **Keith Desormeaux**.

The complete Iroquois field from the rail out (with jockey, trainer and assigned weight): **Mr Wrench It** (Euclyn Prentice Jr., Coty Davidson, 120 pounds); **Royal Urn** (Leonel Reyes, Michelle Nihei, 118); **Drunk as a Skunk** (Joe Rocco Jr., Doug Anderson, 118); **Tight Ten** (Santana, Asmussen, 118); **My Sixth Sense** (Shaun Bridgmohan, Mark Casse, 118); **Tobacco Road** (Leparoux, Asmussen, 120); **Pole Setter** (Florent Geroux, Brad Cox, 118); **Cairo Cat** (Brian Hernandez Jr., Kenny McPeck, 118); **Manny Wah** (Hill, Catalano, 118); **Hog Creek Hustle** (Lanerier, Foley, 118); **Synthesis** (Drayden Van Dyke, Keith Desormeaux, 118); and **Everfast** (Robby Albarado, Dale Romans, 118).

The Iroquois is carded as Race 10 at 5:26 p.m. (all times Eastern) on an 11-race card that begins at 12:45 p.m.

The Iroquois shares Saturday's spotlight with the 50th running of the \$200,000 Pocahontas (GII) for 2-year-old fillies, a 1 1/16-mile event that kicks off the "Road to the Kentucky Oaks" and is part of the Breeders' Cup "Win and You're In Juvenile Fillies Division."

Other stakes races on Saturday's program are the 35th running of the \$100,000 Locust Grove (GIII) for fillies and mares at 1 1/16 miles and the 10th running of the \$100,000 Open Mind (Listed) for fillies and mares at six furlongs.

The four stakes, which are the last four races on the card, comprise an all-stakes late Pick 4 and are part of the late Pick 5 and Single 6 Jackpot sequence.

The sixth annual September Meet begins Friday at Churchill Downs with a 10-race program at 12:45 p.m. and continues on a Thursday-Sunday schedule through Sept. 30. This year's three-week, boutique race meeting will feature record purse levels as horsemen compete for \$5.275 million in prize money, which averages to \$479,545 per day.

General admission to Churchill Downs is \$3 (\$1 for seniors age 60 and up) and \$10 for Downs After Dark on Saturday, Sept. 29. Reserved box seats are \$10 (\$25 for Downs After Dark) and indoor dining options are \$39 (\$73 for Downs After Dark). Children 12 and under are admitted free when accompanied by an adult (Downs After Dark policy: no one under the age of 18 will be admitted to the track unless they are accompanied by a parent or responsible adult). Tickets can be purchased online at www.ChurchillDowns.com/Tickets or by calling (502) 636-4400. For parking information, please visit: <https://www.churchilldowns.com/visit/info/parking>

Opening weekend weather in Louisville will be ideal, according to the **National Weather Service**, with a forecast of mostly sunny skies and temperatures in the 80s.

RUNAWAY ELLIS PARK DEBUTANTE WINNER SERENGETI EMPRESS TOPS 14-HORSE POCAHONTAS

Joel Politi's 13 1/2-length Ellis Park Debutante winner **Serengeti Empress** leads a field of 12 2-year-old fillies that were entered to compete in Saturday's 50th running of the \$200,000 Pocahontas (Grade II) at Churchill Downs, one of four stakes races scheduled at the Louisville track on the first Saturday of its 11-day September Meet and an event with implications for both next spring's 145th running of the Longines Kentucky Oaks (GI) and the upcoming \$2 million Breeders' Cup Juvenile Fillies (GI).

The Pocahontas will be the last of 11 races on the Saturday racing program and has a scheduled post time of 5:57 p.m. (all times Eastern).

The 1 1/16-mile race opens the "**Road to the Kentucky Oaks**" points system that will determine the field of 14 for America's premier race for 3-year-old fillies next spring. The Pocahontas offers Kentucky Oaks points on a scale of 10-4-2-1 to its top four finishers.

The Pocahontas also is a Breeders' Cup "**Win and You're In**" Challenge race for the Breeders' Cup Juvenile Fillies, which will be run Friday, Nov. 2 at Churchill Downs. The Pocahontas winner will earn an automatic berth in the starting gate for the 1 1/16-mile race for 2-year-old fillies, along with \$60,000 in starting fees and a travel stipend.

Trained by **Tom Amoss**, Serengeti Empress (3-2-0-0—\$71,310) controlled every step of the Ellis Park Debutante with **Corey Lanerier** aboard. The 2-year-old Alternation filly has won two of the first three starts of her career with her only hiccup coming in the July 20 Schuylerville (GIII) at Saratoga.

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“I’m really excited about her,” Amoss said. “We came back quickly to run in the Schuylerville after breaking her maiden in her first start. It was one of those races that everything went wrong.

“She’s a really, really good horse. It’s an opportunity for us, as a ‘Win and You’re In Race’, to get a berth in the Breeders’ Cup Juvenile Fillies and just as importantly that race is right here at Churchill Downs.”

Serengeti Empress will be ridden once again by Lanerie and break from the rail.

Among Serengeti Empress’ top competition is **ERJ Racing** and **Dave Kenney**’s standout maiden winner **Splashy Kisses** for California-based trainer **Doug O’Neill**. The daughter of Blame, who was a \$100,000 purchase at the 2018 Fasig Tipton March Sale, won in her second start on Aug. 18 at Del Mar by 5 ¾ lengths under **Joel Rosario**.

Splashy Kisses (2-1-0-0—\$36,345) arrived at Churchill Downs on Tuesday and drew post position five with **Drayden Van Dyke** scheduled to ride.

Also entered in the Pocahontas are New York-invaders **Two Dozen Roses** (2-1-0-0—\$47,388) and **It Justhitthe Wire** (1-0-0-1—\$10,200). The duo exits a six-furlong maiden special weight at Saratoga where It Justhitthe Wire, trained by **Kiaran McLaughlin**, defeated Two Dozen Roses, trained by **Todd Pletcher**, by a neck but was disqualified and placed third because of interference in the stretch.

Ricardo Santana Jr. picks up the mount on Two Dozen Roses and breaks from post position eight while It Justhitthe Wire breaks one spot to the outside in post nine with **Joe Rocco Jr.** aboard.

The field for the Pocahontas, in order of post position (with jockey, trainer and assigned weight): Serengeti Empress (Lanerie, Amoss, 120 pounds); **Love My Honey** (Julien Leparoux, Mike Maker, 118); **My Wynter Rose** (Cory Orm, Tommy Short, 118); **Profound Legacy** (Brian Hernandez Jr., Ian Wilkes, 118); Splashy Kisses (Drayden Van Dyke, Doug O’Neill, 118); **Lightscameraaction** (Robby Albarado, Kenny McPeck, 118); Include Edition (James Graham, Vickie Foley, 118); Two Dozen Roses (Santana, Pletcher, 118); It Justhitthe Wire (Rocco, McLaughlin, 118); **Taylor’s Spirit** (Shaun Bridgmohan, Scott Gelner, 120); **Saved At Dawn** (Fernando De La Cruz, Brad Cox, 118); and **Tapping Pearl** (Florent Geroux, Mark Casse, 118).

BLUE PRIZE RETURNS FROM LAYOFF IN COMPETITIVE GRADE III LOCUST GROVE

Merriebelle Stable’s Fleur de Lis Handicap (GII) winner **Blue Prize (ARG)** will return from a three-month layoff to face a field of nine fillies and mares in Saturday’s \$100,000 Locust Grove (GIII) at Churchill Downs.

The Locust Grove, for fillies and mares 3-years-old and up at 1 1/16 miles, is carded as Race 9 on the 11-race program with a scheduled post time of 4:53 p.m. (all times Eastern).

Trained by **Ignacio Correas IV**, Blue Prize (14-5-7-1—\$605,233) won the June 16 Fleur de Lis Handicap (GII) at Churchill Downs by 1 ½ lengths prior to taking three months off over the summer. The 5-year-old mare, who has two wins and two runner-up finishes over the Churchill Downs surface, finished second in the 2017 Locust Grove.

“This filly loves it here at Churchill Downs,” Correas said. “She’s just improved since we got her from Argentina and I think she’s getting better.”

By winning the Fleur de Lis, Blue Prize was awarded an automatic berth to the Breeders’ Cup Distaff (GI) on Nov. 3 at Churchill Downs but was not originally nominated to the race. The ownership group can nominate the 5-year-old mare by the pre entry deadline of Oct. 22.

Julien Leparoux has the call on Blue Prize and will break from post position three.

Among the challengers to Blue Prize is **Six Column Stables**, **Randy Bloch**, **John Seiler**, **Fred Merritt** and **David Hall**’s **Champagne Problems** (18-5-3-4—\$261,084). The 4-year-old Ghostzapper filly recently triumphed in the Aug. 12 Groupie Doll (GIII) at Ellis Park by 3 ¼ lengths for her first stakes win.

Trained by **Ian Wilkes**, Champagne Problems will be ridden by Hall of Fame jockey **Calvin Borel** and break from post two.

The Locust Grove field from the rail out (with jockey, trainer and assigned weight): **Streamline** (Chris Landeros, Brian Williamson, 123 pounds); Champagne Problems (Borel, Wilkes, 121); Blue Prize (ARG) (Leparoux, Correas, 123); **Dutch Parrot** (Joe Rocco Jr., Will VanMeter, 121); **Pinch Hit** (Shaun Bridgmohan, Brad Cox, 121); **Mannerly** (Corey Lanerie, Brendan Walsh, 121); **Tiger Moth** (Florent Geroux, Cox, 123); **Sailor's Valentine** (Brian Hernandez Jr., Eddie Kenneally, 121); **Pacific Pink** (Ricardo Santana Jr., Steve Asmussen, 121).

ASTROLLINTHEPARK, MISS KENTUCKY, VERTICAL OAK CLASH IN OPEN MIND

The Top 3 finishers in the June 23, \$75,000 Roxelana at Churchill Downs – **Astrollinthepark**, **Miss Kentucky** and **Vertical Oak** – will face each other once again in Saturday's 10th running of the \$100,000 Open Mind beneath the historic Twin Spires.

The six-furlong Open Mind for fillies and mares, which drew a field of seven, is scheduled as Race 8 with a post time of 4:21 p.m.

Dreamchaser Thoroughbreds' Astrollinthepark won the Roxelana for trainer **Larry Jones** after she pressed the early pace before drawing clear by two lengths under **Florent Geroux**. In her most recent start, the 4-year-old homebred filly by Divine Park was second in the West Virginia Secretary Stakes at Mountaineer Park.

Gabriel Saez has the mount on Astrollinthepark and will break from post seven.

Preston Madden's Miss Kentucky, who has not raced since her two-length defeat in the Roxelana, drew post six with **Brian Hernandez Jr.** aboard while **Kirk and Judy Robison's** Vertical Oak, who most recently finished second in the July 25 Honorable Miss (GII) at Saratoga, drew post position three with **Ricardo Santana Jr.** in the saddle.

The Open Mind field from the rail out (with jockey, trainer and assigned weight): **Thirteen Songs** (Robby Albarado, Dallas Stewart, 120); **P Boo** (Jack Gilligan, Kirk Harris, 120); Vertical Oak (Santana, Steve Asmussen, 120); **Courtmeewithcarats** (Sammy Camacho Jr., Clarke Vesty, 120); **Our Majesty** (Corey Lanerie, Ron Moquett, 120); Miss Kentucky (Hernandez, Rusty Arnold II, 122); Astrollinthepark (Saez, Jones, 120).

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